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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001226

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FURTHER REACTION TO NIGER DELTA AMNESTY  
PROPOSAL

REF: A. ABUJA 1173  
[1](#)B. ABUJA 1210  
[1](#)C. ABUJA 1132  
[1](#)D. ABUJA 1102

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Following President Yar'Adua's June 25 proclamation of an amnesty for all Niger Delta "militants" prepared to come out of the creeks and give up their weapons before October 4, one alleged "militant" commander, and persons claiming to represent several others, said they were willing to comply. A statement from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND -- a loose umbrella organization with which several commanders are aligned), however, denounced the amnesty proposal, and insisted that its forces were not "criminals" who needed amnesty, but freedom fighters; it also demanded that Henry Okah, one of its alleged leaders who is on trial for treason and gun-running, be released. In response, the President sent his Interior Minister to inform Okah that he would, in fact, be covered by the amnesty; the GON also approached the National Assembly about providing funds to cover the cost of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program for "militants" willing to accept it. The observation of an important Senate staffer that the GON is putting this all together "on the fly" strikes us as accurate. End Summary.

SOME COMMANDERS BUY IN

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[1](#)2. (U) On June 26, the day following the issuance of the proclamation, Solomon Ndigbara, an Ogoni commander from Rivers state who has the nickname "Osama bin Laden," formally accepted the amnesty offer, and surrendered his weapons to the GON. The handover occurred in a ceremony attended by Interior Minister (and Amnesty Committee Chairman) Godwin Abbe, and Commissioner of Police Mike Okiro, and representatives of both broadcast and print media. In a later interview by the News Agency of Nigeria, Ndigbara pointed out that it was politicians who originally armed the young men in order to intimidate voters. "Politicians should stop buying guns for youths, because after the elections, the guns remain with the boys, and they use them for other purposes," he said.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Also on June 26, persons claiming to represent "militant" commanders Ateke Tom, Farah Dagogo, Soboma George,

and Victor Ebikabowei (aka "Boyloaf") issued a statement "accept(ing) peace as encapsulated in the said offer of amnesty," but making any handover of arms contingent on a meeting with President Yar'Adua to get assurances about their security and agreement on the details of the DDR program to be offered.

BUT MEND DOES NOT

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14. (C) On June 27, however, a MEND spokesman e-mailed the media, denouncing both the amnesty and those who had claimed to accept it on behalf of some of its affiliated commanders. The statement declared that MEND's response to the proclamation "has not been to comment on it officially because, from all indications, it is not directed at freedom fighters which MEND is part of. The proclamation of amnesty seems to be directed at criminals such as armed robbers, rapists, kidnappers seeking ransom, etc. . . . If the proclamation was directed at freedom fighters with a cause, it would have addressed the root issues such as genuine, unconditional release of Henry Okah and others, true federalism, federal character in political appointments, investigations of JTF extra-judicial killings, troop withdrawal timetables, displaced civilians, reconstruction of their sacked villages and their rehabilitation." (FYI: multiple sources attribute most of MEND's statements to one of Okah's relatives, and note that they regularly assert that Okah's fate is a central issue to any Delta settlement. End FYI.) The statement added that the MEND commanders Farah Dagogo and Boyloaf "dissociate themselves from the purported proposals by one lawyer . . . parading himself as their

ABUJA 00001226 002 OF 002

representative over an amnesty that is not even directed at them."

15. (SBU) In apparent response to the MEND statement, President Yar'Adua directed Interior Minister Abbe (who was also head of the committee set up to formulate the amnesty proposals) to meet with Henry Okah and formally offer him amnesty. Presidential Spokesman Segun Adeniyi revealed this to the State House press corps on June 29, stressing that the gesture was intended to underline the GON's sincerity about the amnesty offer. Adeniyi added that, once he accepted the offer, and after brief consultations with the Government of Angola (where Okah was originally arrested for arms smuggling), Okah would be freed.

DDR PLANNING

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16. (C) Presidency officials have begun approaching the National Assembly about funding for the centers where "militants" who accept the amnesty would live while receiving educational and other assistance to help them reintegrate into society. According to a Special Assistant to the Senate President, the GON is seeking about N50 billion (approx. \$330 million) for its various DDR programs, though the National Assembly has yet to receive any written details of what is proposed. The official described the Presidency as "sort of doing this on the fly." He added that (as reported in ref. D), some of the "militant" commanders were continuing to demand that they be paid for the arms they turn in, a position strongly opposed by both the Presidency and the National Assembly. Several observers have noted previous incidents when offers to buy up weapons in the Delta have yielded only old and worn out firearms, the money for which was then reportedly used to buy new weapons. Other National Assembly sources claim that the GON is hoping to establish 15 to 20 camps where those accepting the amnesty could be housed while receiving training and other benefits of the DDR program. The Media Coordinator for the GON's Amnesty Committee, Timiebi Koripamo-Agary, told journalists that the DDR operation would be headquartered in Enugu, which she described as a neutral venue, near, but not within, the Delta region.

COMMENT

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17. (C) We recall that the President first announced an amnesty proposal on April 2, and promised details within a week. As with much else here (e.g., the cabinet reshuffle announced for April 2008 which was not completed until January 2009), the time between promised action and actual delivery has been considerably prolonged, almost certainly reflecting divisions within the President's inner circle about how to proceed. While the inclusion in the amnesty proclamation of a specific deadline (October 4) may be intended to push the process forward, we continue to doubt that the Delta can be resolved by dealing with what is only one symptom of a complex problem. End comment.

18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS